A Report on the origin and present state of the Gypsies

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Report &c

In the earlier part of the fifteenth century the attention of various European nations was directed towards a people entirely different in appearance and manners from the established inhabitants and speaking a language peculiar to themselves. None could account for their origin. Neither could the route by which they had been introduced be explained. They took up a temporary abode in places most congenial to their disposition and were gradually dispersed throughout the continent and among the principal islands. By common consent, confirmed with some

Name

imperfect traditions regarding their history, the name of Gypsies or Egyptians has been bestowed upon them. The French call them ~~Zingari~~ Bohemians and the Turks Zinganees.

Where found

They wander about in Asia in the interior parts of Africa and like locusts have overrun most of the European nations.

Number

There whole number in Europe is believed to exceed 700,000. They are found in considerable numbers in Great Brittain. The vigilance of the police has rendered them less numerous in France. In Spain they are believed to amount to 60,000. They are somewhat numerous in Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Russia. In Italy they abound

particularly in the states of the church. But their chief population is in the S. E. parts of Europe particularly in the states of Hungary, Transylvania, and various parts of Turkey, which seems ever to have been the place of general rendezvous for the Gypsie tribe.

Appearance

These people have continued the same, wherever they have gone; unaltered by the lapse of time, the variation of climate and the force of example. They are the same in Europe Asia and Africa. They are of a swarthy complexion symmetrically formed and rarely subject to deformity. They have beautiful white teeth and the women fine black eyes; but the men are characterized by a scowling aspect. They are not remarkable for strength; they are swift of

foot, but decidedly deficient in courage.

Manners & customs

The Gypsies testify an indifference to the quality of their food, unknown among the least civilized tribes of Europe. It is all one with them whether it be a carrion of sheep, hog cow or other beast, horse flesh only excepted. So far from being disquieted with it, that it is a great dainty. They say "That the flesh of a beast which God kills, must be better than one killed by the hand of man". In the year 1782, after having for a length of time disturbed the peace of Hungary, many were brought to trial, and convicted of various crimes; among which were robbery, murder & feeding on human flesh. Yet whether these Gypsies were actually

guilty of such enormities is doubtful. They have an immoderate desire for ardent spirits, and tobacco is so grateful, that they will be content to abstain from every thing else for a whole day, for a single leaf of it.

In the neighbourhood of civilized life they continue barbarous. They never dwell in cities or towns. They live in tents and huts, or even in excavations of the earth, generally on the side of a hillock that has a southern exposure. A roof is formed of rafters, overlaid with turf, and a woolen cloth is often drawn across the aperture left for a door.

(a) Some of the more miserable only shelter themselves in towers or behind hedges.

A fire occupies the middle of the hut, around which the children lie naked, and indeed the whole tribe, although delighting in finery, go very scantily clothed. If a single gaudy article can be obtained, the rest is disregarded. Whence a man is sometimes seen in an old red silk coat, or a woman adorned with glaring silk ribbons while the other appparel consists of rags.

Their marriages take place at an early ~~age~~ period, and with little ceremony. Any one of the number convened on the occasion may be called upon to perform the part of priest. In India a scene of riot precedes the establishment of the parties, and certain mystical ceremonies attend the marriage. The men are very jealous of their wives and act in a cruel manner towards them.

Occupations

They are chiefly employed in smith work, the manufactory of wooden ware and horse dealing. In Hungary and Transylvania they are executioners. They display great skill in torturing their fellow creatures. They are also players of dead heart and washers of gold. The women can neither sew nor spin. They deal in old clothes and fortune telling. They pretend to great skill in divination, and tell the fortunes of the credulous from palmistry, physiognomy or moles on the skin. The peasant dreads their power and from motives of fear lest they should spoil his cattle or horses contributes to their support. Most of them in India, Turkey & Spain subsist on the wages of prostitution. They combine musick with their allurements and form a considerable portion

of the dancing girls of India. The character of their dances is the same every where. The men and women sometimes having forward dramatic exhibitions, for the performance of which they are called before the houses of the wealthy.

The tribe is utterly unacquainted with science and litterature. The scanty knowledge of their forefathers remains with them unimproved. No education is given to the young, unless it be instruction in obscenity. A few of the Gypsies in Spain, however, pretend to knowledge in medicine or surgery; and the females in the neighbourhood of Calcutta visit that and other towns and prescribe for the complaints of their own

Science & Literature

Language

The language of the gypsies though it has undergone ~~some~~ many changes from their successive migrations is peculiar to themselves in Europe. But it contains many affinities with a dialect of particular castes in Hindostan. With respect to the construction and inflection of the two languages they are evidently the same.

Government

The Gypsies of Europe acknowledge a chief or leader who usually ~~signifies~~ assumes the dignified title of waywode or prince. The most exalted of these titles is given to one who presides over the gold washers of Hungary, and the dignity is elective, but with some regard to descent from a former waywode and also to the stature and apparel of the person chosen. He is

merely lifted up three times with the loudest acclamations amidst a numerous concourse of the tribe. His wife is treated with similar ceremony, while the dignity of both is recognised by all present. In Hindostan the Gypsies have a chief who has very little direct authority over them, but he controuls the establishment of sets who profess dramatic exhibitions and draws a tribute from their profits. They even acknowledge a rude judicial procedure before a court of five persons or a general assembly, and any individual for petty offences, must pass the ordeal of applying a hot iron to his tounge. If conviction follows the culprit is generally sentenced to pay a fine in

liquor of which his judges partake; or as a mark of the highest ignominy, he may be condemned to have his nose rubbed on the ground.

Their train of thinking is childish. They manifest no virtuous principles, or any desire to excel, and the little reason they profess is wholly devoted to the gratification of appetite. Their crimes are numerous: directed against the property more than the persons of their fellow creatures. They are lively, loquacious and chattering; fickle and inconstant faithless and ungrateful; timid and servile; cruel revengeful and universally vain.

Origin &c

The origin of this people is generally believed to be Egyptian; and that belief is as old as their existance in Europe. But their mother

appears to be little foundation for this belief.

Historians inform us that when Sultan Selim conquered Egypt in the year 1517 several of the natives refused to submit to the Turkish yoke, and revolted under one Zinganeer: but being at length surrounded and banished, they agreed to disperse in small parties all over the world, where their supposed skill in the black art gave them an universal reception in that age of superstition and credulity. But neither their size, complexion, manners or appearance correspond with those of any Egyptians described in ancient or modern history. Their language differs

entirely from the Coptic. They are indeed to be found in Egypt; but they wander there as strangers and form a distinct people as in Europe and other countries. The inhabitants of Egypt treat them as ~~Strangers~~ foreigners.

It is said that there is a striking resemblance between the Gypsies and the natives of Hindostan. Should this be correct they may have reached the isthmus of Suez by the north of India and hence crossed it into Egypt and from thence into Europe. They might have received their name from Egypt, being their last point of departure from the east. The time of their first appearing in Europe is unknown; but towards the beginning and middle of the fifteenth century

they attracted attention as a strange people. They are recorded to have frequented Germany in 1417, Switzerland in 1418; Italy in 1422. It is said that they were originally known in France by the name of Bohemians, and arrived at Paris on the 17th of August 1427. They travelled in hordes generally of 70 or 100 persons, and each horde had a leader who assumed a title.

All that can be said respecting the origin of the Gypsies is mere surmise. After all that has been written on the subject, there still hangs a cloud over the origin of this extraordinary race.

Shortly after they made their appearance in Europe they were spread over

it. At first they were believed to be pilgrims chiefly from the Holy Land; and hence they both received protection and indulgence; but their real disposition soon betrayed itself, and rendered them obnoxious to all civilized nations. Every arm was lifted against them. They were driven from ~~the~~ place to place; and at length the very name of being a Gypsie ~~was~~ ~~were~~ esteemed a crime deserving capital punishment. England endeavoured to expel them in 1530; France in 1560; and Spain in 1611. but never with complete success.

There have been many attempts to reclaim them. The politic and patriotic views of the government there

directed have not been attended with the success which they merited. In the year 1782, the Empress Maria Theresa promulgated an edict, prohibiting Gypsies from dwelling in tents & commanding them to dwell in fixed abodes. They were forbidden to wander about, to allow their children to go naked, to deal in horses, and to wear cloaks, whereby thefts might be easily concealed. They were also commanded to abstain from feeding on carrion, to frequent the churches, and to conform to the manners of the inhabitants of the territory where they resided. Their usual name was to be abolished

and in future they were, instead of Gypsies, to be called new boors, and occupy themselves in the actual prosecution of agriculture. These regulations, merely concerned, being ineffectual, severer enactments followed. It was decreed, that no gypsie should be permitted to marry, unless he could show himself in a situation to maintain a wife and family; and that those who had children should be forcibly deprived of them, in order that the rising generation should have the benefit of a better mode of education. The latter part of this ordinance was carried into effect, and in certain districts, all the children

above five years of age were conveyed away in waggons from their parents. But it is not evident that such compulsory measures were beneficial.

Religion

The gypsies have no settled principles of religion; they are Turks with Turks and Christians with Christians. It does not appear that they celebrate any religious rite or entertain the common sentiments of mankind respecting a future state. They however raise a loud & vehement cry at funerals and their children are circumcised in Turkey and baptized in Europe. Their condition is indeed wretched, wicked and

depraved. And notwithstanding there are many benevolent institutions in Europe little has been done for this people they are this day the objects of reproach and detestation in every country where they are to be found.
The fourteenth Vol. of the Christian observer for the year 1815 contains some suggestions for improving their condition in England. It is recommended that there should be four or six stations in different parts of the kingdom and at those stations the gypsies should be collected and instructed.

whether this plan has in any degree been carried into operation is unknown.

For more information on this subject see Gnellmans dissertations on the Gypsies, Laborde's view of Spain; Swinburne's travels in Spain; Twiss Travels in Spain; Asiatic Researches, vol. VII; Pottingers travels, Encyclopedias, Morses Geography